

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 17, 2016

The Honorable Ashton Carter
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

We write to express serious concerns with the absence of an appropriate and timely path to replace the UH-1N helicopters that provide security for America's intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) fleet. Today, we request detailed information, including the options currently under consideration, for how the Defense Department will act to better secure our nation's most powerful weapons.

On April 27, 2016 you testified to the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee that the UH-1Ns "definitely need to be replaced and need to be done urgently." However, we were informed last week that you have disapproved of the Air Force's preferred path to replace the UH-1Ns through the sole-source option that would address this capability gap most expeditiously and instead have directed the Air Force to pursue other options. This approach could take as much as four years and waste an estimated \$40 million per year to provide an interim security capability. The nuclear security forces located at Malmstrom, Minot and F.E. Warren Air Force Bases all depend on these antiquated Vietnam-era helicopters to provide quick reaction force protection and convoy security protection. The UH-1N, however, meets the requirements for neither - something the Defense Department has known about for too long.

In a House Armed Services Strategic Forces Subcommittee Hearing in February, both Admiral Haney and Undersecretary McKeon stated their concern regarding the aging UH-1N aircraft and the need to replace these aircraft as soon as possible. And just two months later you told the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense that we "need a safe, secure and reliable nuclear deterrent as far into the future as I can see." The decision made last week contradicts these statements, and leaves security risks - in Montana, for example, where 165 sites over 14,000 square miles rely on outdated helicopters for the security forces.

The Senate and House of Representatives have both put forth proposals in their Defense Authorization that would give the authority to the Air Force to procure Black Hawks. Moreover, a bipartisan coalition in the House and Senate wrote in support of an urgent fix to this matter. The Department of Defense has failed to act, however. Today, we request detailed actions that will be taken by the Defense Department to better secure our land based nuclear assets, including a timeline for each of those actions. Specifically, we wish to know what steps will be taken to mitigate the failure of current aircraft at the missile bases to reach an ICBM in the prescribed time should there be a security incident.

We hope that the Defense Department will support the Air Force's work to carry out the most expedited acquisition process possible, and look forward to your response. Thank you for your continued attention to this very important priority.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator



JON TESTER
United States Senator



HEIDI HEITKAMP
United States Senator



JOHN HOEVEN
United States Senator



MICHAEL ENZI
United States Senator



RYAN ZINKE
Member of Congress



ADRIAN SMITH
Member of Congress



CYNTHIA LUMMIS
Member of Congress



KEVIN CRAMER
Member of Congress